



Steve Troxler, Commissioner of Agriculture

NCDA&CS Food Distribution Monthly E-Notification

June 2013

- [NC Agribusiness puts BBQ on school lunch menus](#) Gary Gay
- [Farm to School Calendar 2013-2014 Year](#) Ted Fogleman
- [2013 – 2014 Orders and 209 Report](#) Bob Sitton
- [Bob's List Wrap Up](#) Bob Sitton
- [DOD 209 Balance](#) Bob Sitton
- [Audit Reminder: Summer Feeding included in recordable totals for year](#) Bob Sitton
- [Thank You](#) ALL STAFF
- [Deadline: Farm to School Orders is Friday June 7th](#) Ted Fogleman
- [SENS: State Emergency Notification System](#) Tony Wilkins
- [Save the Date: March Across Carolina: Hickory 11-6-2013 and Raleigh 11-7-2013](#)
- [SNA Annual Summer Conference](#) Gary Gay

Fourth-generation N.C. agribusiness putting BBQ back on school lunch menus



Craig Wood, co-owner of Brookwood Farms, checks out pit-cooked pork before it is prepped for packaging as heat-and-serve barbecue. The Siler City-based company began supplying some school systems with heat-and-serve barbecue in 2004. The company also sells its products in grocery stores and retail locations.

The South is full of food traditions, and barbecue is one that North Carolinians take pretty seriously. Craig and Twig Wood, owners of Brookwood Farms, a fourth-generation pit-cooked barbecue manufacturer, bring that same level of passion to their work.

Before readers start writing letters to the editor, this isn't an Eastern North Carolina-versus-Western North Carolina barbecue article, but rather an agribusiness success story about a local company whose heat-and-serve barbecue is now part of a number of school lunch programs across the state and who, in 2012, sold a total of 9 million pounds of barbecue. The businesses' products are sold through food service companies, retail stores, company restaurants in the Charlotte and Raleigh airports, and school lunch programs.

Brookwood Farms' success in supplying barbecue to schools started with a simple question: How could barbecue, which is such a staple of Southern cuisine, not be a regular feature on school lunch menus?

The answer, they found, was a bit surprising. Students simply didn't care for the barbecue being offered – often oven-roasted pork flavored with liquid smoke. "What we were told again and again was that traditionally kids only want to eat chicken tenders and pizza," said Craig Wood.

The Woods figured a better, more traditional-tasting product, may sway students to give school barbecue another try.

To get started on product development, the Woods contacted staff members with the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Food Distribution Division, who explained how the school lunch program worked and helped introduce them to some key contacts in the school nutrition industry.

"Our role in helping Brookwood get into the school lunch business was to steer them in the right direction, since this was completely new to them," said Gary Gay, director of the Food Distribution Division. "The brothers have been able to take an idea and grow it into a successful part of their business plan, which is a win for the company and the jobs it supports, a win for the schools and a win for the economy."

The Woods were able to gather feedback on the type of product that might appeal to students, meet nutritional guidelines and also be easy for cafeteria staff to prepare and serve.

In the 1980s when the company decided to expand into barbecue, Craig Wood spent the better part of a year talking to pit masters and learning more about cooking techniques and how to infuse the rich smoky flavor into the pork. There were many different types of cooking fuel sources, but, he learned that time spent slowly cooking over hot coals or embers seemed to be the most common denominator to great-tasting barbecue. Once he gathered the information, Craig Wood set

about building a pit and through old-fashioned trial-and-error, he perfected the techniques that are used today to create Brookwood Farm's barbecue products. The company officially began cooking over pits in 1982, and entered the school lunch business in 2004.

For the schools, Brookwood Farms smokes pork shoulders, which is one of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's commodity purchases. The frozen meat would normally be shipped to schools to use, but if schools choose to process with the company, that meat comes to the plant and is prepared for the schools for a manufacturing fee.

The company sampled its products at a special food service show geared for school systems and came away with a modest number of orders from child nutrition directors who tasted the product and decided to try it with students. Business took off, and now the company has its products in schools in 12 states.

The business' focus on following a tried-and-true recipe and not taking cooking shortcuts is part of what makes the product popular with customers and school nutrition directors alike.

Rachel Finley, school nutrition director for the Johnston County School System, understands the tradition of pork barbecue in the state and is happy the kids coming through the lunch line enjoy "barbecue day" in the cafeteria.

"When it comes to meat items, I like to offer things that kids normally find; if I am going to serve barbecue, then I want it to be pork barbecue because that is what they would be traditionally eating at home or out," Finley said. "What I like about the product is the ingredient label is slim. There are no fillers, not a lot of added ingredients; just good old-fashioned pork barbecue and vinegar sauce. It is gluten free and with the plethora of dietary needs we have in the schools, it really meets our needs."

In anticipation of upcoming nutritional changes to school lunches, Brookwood Farms has created a lower-sodium barbecue. Finley is happy the company has been proactive about these changes. She has sampled the product and plans to incorporate the lower-sodium barbecue into Johnston County school lunch menus this coming year. She thinks kids will like the new product.

Another plus for Finley is being able to work with a North Carolina company. "I like to keep my money in North Carolina if I can," she said.

School lunch products are just one part of the company's successful business model. While it has grown in geographic reach with its school lunch business, Craig Wood is happy to keep the business equation about the same, preferring a managed growth approach to business and ensuring the company does not to have all its eggs in any one basket or market sector.

The process

On a recent Friday morning, the last shoulders and hams were coming out of the massive charcoal pits where they began their journey to becoming pork barbecue some 12 hours earlier. Some parts of the production process move along quickly, while others such as the slow cooking are not. Each leg of the process is exact; there are no shortcuts, no variations from the tried-and-true process that yields the flavorful product that Brookwood Farms has built its reputation on.

The sweet smell of smoked pork hung in the air, while workers quickly separated the steaming, tender meat from bones and skin, readying the meat to be chopped and sauced in quantities on a grand scale.

From there, the finished product has to cool before it can move into the packing portion of the plant where it is loaded into 1- or 5-pound tubs for shipping. The work is remarkably labor-intensive, but like everything involved in the preparation, that too, factors into the finished product.

Many Southerners are familiar with the process of barbecuing – whether you prefer Eastern- or Western-style 'cue. The meat is slow-cooked, and heat sources can vary from wood or gas to charcoal.

It is difficult to put into context what 200-plus gallons of barbecue sauce looks like rolling by in a large, square stainless cart from one processing destination to the next, or the speed with which hundreds of pounds of pork are chopped or sauced. It is equally difficult to describe the four cooking rooms, each with two long lines of identical pits running the entire length of the room. One could imagine the thick fragrance of smoked pork intensifies when all the cookers are working their slow magic.

Pit-cooked pork barbecue is far from the company's only product. It also sells whole Boston butts, beef barbecue, chicken barbecue, barbecue chicken quarters and barbecue pork ribs.

The Wood brothers are proud of the business and how it has grown. Craig's kids, Craig II and Ashley, and Twig's kids, Burton and Stephen, are the next generation poised to carry the business forward.

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[Top of the Document](#)

NC Farm to School Calendar SY 2013-2014

Week of July 1, 2013	Cantaloupes, Seedless Watermelons, Sprite Melons, Collards, Kale, Peaches, Grape Tomatoes, Blueberries, Red Potatoes, Cabbage
Week of July 14, 2013	Seedless Watermelons, Cantaloupes, Tomatoes, Grape Tomatoes, Peaches, Sprite Melons, Cucumbers, Zucchini, Yellow Squash, Apple Slices, (Note: All Grape Tomatoes will be offered in a clamshell or 2 oz. bag.)
Week of July 28, 2013	Same items as above
Week of August 11, 2013	Same items as above
Week of August 25, 2013	Seedless Watermelons, Cantaloupes, Tomatoes, Grape Tomatoes, Peaches, Asian Pear
Week of September 8, 2013	Tomatoes, Grape Tomatoes, Cucumbers, Asian Pear, Squash, Zucchini
Week of September 22, 2013	Apples, Sweet Potatoes, Kale, Collards
Week of October 6, 2013	Apples, Kale, Collards
Week of October 20, 2013	Apples, Broccoli, Romaine, Sweet Potatoes
Week of November 3, 2013	Broccoli Crowns, Cabbage, Collards, Romaine
Week of November 17, 2013	Sweet Potatoes, Apples, Broccoli
Week of December 1, 2013	Sweet Potatoes
Week of December 8, 2013	Cabbage, Broccoli Crowns, Collards, Romaine, Apple Slices
Week of January 5, 2014	Collards, Cabbage, Apple Slices, Sweet Potatoes
Week of January 26, 2014	Apples, Sweet Potatoes
Week of February 9, 2014	Kale, Apples Slices, Collards
Week of February 23, 2014	Sweet Potatoes, Apple Slices
Week of March 9, 2014	Apple Slices
Week of March 23, 2014	Apple Slices, Sweet Potatoes
Week of April 6, 2014	Kale, Collards
Week of April 27, 2014	Strawberries, Romaine
Week of May 4, 2014	Strawberries, Romaine
Week of May 11, 2014	Strawberries, Romaine
Week of May 18, 2014	Strawberries, Blueberries

[Top of the Document](#)

SY 2013-2014 Orders

Congratulations to you all on a job well done, entering your orders in NCECOS for the ensuing year. The orders have now been rolled up and sent to USDA for purchase. Across the state, we used 95% of our entitlement. To those of you who have entitlement remaining, be on watch for future “ECOS Alerts” from Gary. That is your notice to open NCECOS as USDA has opened the catalog for orders.

SY 2013-2014 209 Renort

Your now have access to your 209 Report for the ensuing year. Please review it carefully making sure your DOD set aside is correct, and that you can handle the quantities of USDA foods on the “estimated delivery dates.” If changes are needed, please contact Bob Sitton, David Usher, Debbie Ball or, for commodity processing inquiries, Tysha Sherard.

Top of the Document

Bob's List

Activity on Bob's List has slowed to a crawl as we near the end of the school year. It proved to be a great tool for you to use to relocate slow moving USDA foods, find some foods you could use, and a great way for us to move our surplus foods. I am confident we reduced the amount of food disposal by using this valuable tool, so watch for Bob's List again next school year.

Top of the Document

DOD 209 Balance

Please use the balance figures as they are in FFAVORS for end of year auditing purposes. The Prime vendor for the State usually will not close the month of May until end of June, and June will close near end of July, hopefully.

Top of the Document

SY 2012-2013 Audit Reminder

Just a reminder for you to include the Summer Feeding 209 Report if applicable along with your NSLP 209 Report to your auditor. This report is found in NCECOS Reports.

[Top of the Document](#)

THANK YOU !!!

From all of us at NCDA&CS Food Distribution, we have enjoyed working with you during this school year, and look forward to doing it all again next year. Knowing that you will still continue to work hard during the summer months, we wish you a safe and enjoyable summer.

[Top of the Document](#)

We are making rapid progress on a new notification process that will systematically notify all schools of any commodity recalls or food alerts. This process will enable NCDA&CS Food Distribution to quickly send out the same message to all our customers. You can elect to receive multiple contact notifications via: office phone, fax, cell numbers or even a text message.

With this new system, we will be able to simultaneously give everyone the details of what has occurred and what steps will need to be taken. Testing will begin the weeks to come, so we can have the system operational and ready for deployment on August 1, 2013.

[Top of the Document](#)

I hope you can join us for the SNA – NC Annual Conference in Greensboro, June 18-20, at the Sheraton Four Seasons. Please drop by our booth on Wednesday during the Food Show. You never know what you might encounter visiting our booth, I ensure you will have a great time. On Thursday there will be several mini sessions to choose from. Food Distribution will be leading one session on Net Off Invoice and Heather Barnes will be leading one on Safe Handling of Produce. So please take some time out of your busy schedule to network, learn and have some fun.

[Top of the Document](#)